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Meese to bolster Afghans on visit

By John McCaslin
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President Reagan has asked Attorney General Edwin Meese to carry a message of encouragement to Afghan freedom fighters later this month.

Mr. Meese plans to deliver the message during a special trip, under tight security, to a refugee camp in Pakistan near the Afghanistan border.

He will address the mujahideen rebels and read a message from Mr. Reagan, according to Justice Department spokesman Patrick Korten.

Mr. Korten said he did not know what the message would say.

The region which Mr. Meese will visit is near Afghanistan's Kunar Valley, a strategic mountainous area where some 10,000 Soviet troops last

June launched their largest offensive in the 7-year-old war.

The camp Mr. Meese will visit on March 26, at the end of his two-week fact-finding trip into the flow of illicit drugs in the region, is about an hour's drive from Pakistan's northern city of Peshawar, but an administration official said that, for security reasons, he would not pinpoint the location.

The U.S. delegation will include John C. Lawn, director of the Drug Enforcement Administration; Charles Blau, associate deputy attorney general; Francis Keating, assistant secretary of the Treasury for enforcement and operations; Mark Dion, deputy assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters; and Fred Colgan, deputy director of the White House Drug Abuse Policy office. The FBI will send several agents along for security.



Photo by James Fiedler Jr./The Washington Times
Attorney General Edwin Meese III

The delegation will leave Saturday aboard an Air Force jet with stops planned in Thailand, Burma, Pakistan, India and Italy.

"The trip is a presidential mission," said Mr. Korten. "Its main purpose is to deal on an international level with the worldwide narcotics problem."

In Bangkok, Mr. Meese will sign a mutual legal assistance treaty with Thailand that U.S. officials hope will improve joint investigations on narcotics, organized crime and terrorism matters.

Justice sources said the attorney general will express concern to the Thai government over a region known as the "Golden Triangle," one of the world's major sources of heroin production.

Over the past several years, the United States has encouraged — through covert action — the freedom fighters in Afghanistan and is believed to have provided well above \$200 million in assistance. Last May, the Senate unanimously approved \$15 million in direct humanitarian aid to the Afghan rebels.

The Soviet Union has been unable to quell the unrest since seizing the country in December 1979, although they have closed off most of the border.